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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER: SERBIA MUST CHOOSE EU, BUT ONLY WITH KOSOVO

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Summary

¶11. (SBU) Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic told political science students and foreign diplomats that Serbia was at a crossroads and must choose to join the EU to bring stability and economic prosperity to the country. Playing the Kosovo card, Jeremic insisted Serbia would join the EU intact. Publicly, Jeremic criticized the west and the United States, in particular, for promoting "illegal" Kosovo independence which risked destabilizing the region. Out of the limelight, he apologized for the rhetoric and chilled relations. Jeremic's speech demonstrated the DS efforts to retain the democratic vote by stealing the DSS platform. End Summary.

Serbia Must Join the EU

¶12. (U) In a speech entitled "Strategic Overview of Serbia's Foreign Policy Direction," on April 18 Foreign Minister Jeremic explained to students and foreign diplomats at Belgrade University's Political Sciences Faculty why Serbia should join the EU and what the DS was doing to get Kosovo back. Jeremic described the "Serbian singularity," a unique civilization at the crossroads between east and west that had always had a pivotal role to play on the international stage. The major exception to this was during the Milosevic regime, which Jeremic blamed for the Serbia's current problems. Although these turbulent times had passed, the "battle for the soul of the western Balkans has not yet been fought to the finish," he said. If Serbian citizens did not make the right choice in the May 11 elections, Serbia would be left out of what was probably the final stage of EU enlargement. Jeremic said there was no middle ground between isolation and joining the EU. Isolation would lead to a repetition of the mistakes of the past.

¶13. (U) Jeremic gave three reasons Serbia should join the EU.

-- First, every state that had joined the EU had enjoyed

economic growth and prosperity. "The EU delivers what it promises, and that is a better life," said Jeremic.

-- Second, Serbia was clearly already a part of Europe, and joining the EU, "the greatest project in history," would give citizens a sense of belonging to something greater.

-- Finally, the EU represented true democratic values, such as rule of law, equality, human rights, and diversity. The EU would not solve all of Serbia's problems but would provide the framework with which Serbia could address them.

Joining the EU did not mean giving up the special friendship with Russia. Indeed, Serbia would play a special role in bringing the EU and Russia closer.

But Serbia Will Join Only with Kosovo

¶4. (U) Jeremic emphasized the choice was not between the EU and Kosovo. All parties and politicians agreed that Serbia must protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. DS had demonstrated its commitment to overturning Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by Jeremic's diplomatic activity--recalling ambassadors from countries that recognized Kosovo and lobbying others to vote for a September UNGA resolution to request an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling.

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¶5. (U) Jeremic stated the reasons that UDI had been bad for the Balkans, asserting multiple times that small Serbia was holding its own against the "pressures of powerful advocates" of Kosovo independence. Kosovo independence was not only an illegal secessionist act that would ultimately fail, but it was an attack on the democratic course the country had taken since the fall of the Milosevic regime. UDI also divided the Balkans, forcing neighbors to choose to support Kosovo or Serbia. Third, UDI complicated entry into the EU, not because the EU would make giving up Kosovo a requirement of accession but because Serbian citizens associated the EU with UDI. Finally, UDI legitimated the doctrine of imposed solutions.

Students Question Jeremic

¶6. (U) During the question and answer session, a student asked what Serbia would do if Kosovo tried to join the EU, either before or after Serbia. Jeremic replied that he promised that Serbia would only join the EU with its territorial integrity intact. Giving up Kosovo was not a condition for EU membership. In response to a question a few minutes later, however, he said that some countries, most notably Great Britain and Cyprus, had joined the EU with ongoing secession disputes. He said Cyprus, in particular, proved that it was acceptable to join the EU while "disagreements among the parties" persisted.

¶17. (U) Responding to a question about the Middle East, Jeremic said he hoped for a negotiated solution that would involve all sides and accommodate their legitimate wishes, and he drew parallels to the Balkans. Jeremic said that an imposed solution was no more appropriate in Serbia than it was between the Israelis and Palestinians. Jeremic acknowledged that Milosevic had committed heinous crimes against ethnic Albanians, but suggested that those crimes been no worse than Saddam Hussein's crimes against the Kurds, noted that the west rejected the possibility of a Kurdish state while accepting Kosovo secession.

Diplomatic Steps to Overturn Kosovo Independence

¶18. (U) Jeremic stressed that Serbia would use international institutions and influence to challenge Kosovo independence. Serbia would appeal to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule the declaration of independence illegal, calling such rulings influential, if non-binding. Such a ruling, he suspected, would cause the "great powers" to withdraw their recognition and enable Serbia to return its recalled ambassadors.

Jeremic Apologizes for Anti-U.S. Stance

¶19. (SBU) At a reception for the diplomats in the audience following the speech, Jeremic approached poloff and apologized for the anti-American remarks but said he was compelled to use such rhetoric for the duration of the election campaign. He asked that poloff pass his regards to the Ambassador whom he was sorry he could not meet but looked forward to seeing after the elections.

Comment

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¶10. (SBU) Jeremic's ploy to talk to diplomats via intermediaries, in this case, political science students, illustrates DS's dilemma in sounding pro-Western while freezing relations with western governments. Clearly Jeremic meant for his message to reach the diplomatic corps as much as he wanted to interact with students. DS's strategy retains its internal dissonance, how to embrace Europe and keep Kosovo. The DS does a disservice to its electorate by avoiding a clear appraisal of pre-1999 events, instead leading the public along PM Kostunica's line that Serbs are perpetual victims, bearing no responsibility for the international community's decision to remove Kosovo from Serbian rule. End Comment.

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